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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE — Radio Service — OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, February 14, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "CANS AND COMPANY." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Maybe somewhere on earth there lives a housewife who has never had to meet an emergency at mealtime. Maybe somewhere a woman exists who has never had unexpected company, who has never had to serve a rush meal, whose husband has never brought home last-minute guests. I say maybe such a lucky lady exists. But I doubt it. At least, I've never seen nor heard of her.

Most wives know all too well that frantic feeling that comes when you have to get a meal suddenly for more than you expected.

For example, the man of the house may arrive home at night with a hearty: "Just look who I brought home to dinner with me."

You come out to greet the guests. And all the time you are saying: "Oh, how nice of you to come," you are thinking: "But what am I going to feed them with only two chops in the house?"

Ten to one, your husband adds: "And are we hungry? We're starved. Just watch us go for that dinner of yours. Boys, if I say it myself, my wife is a whizz of a cook. Something new every night, too."

You try to sound encouraging, and say: "I'll have it ready in a jiffy, dear," or something like that. And then you go out to the pantry, and wring your hands, and wonder how on earth you are going to feed three men with appetites and live up to your husband's praise. You look up at the canned food on the shelf for inspiration.-- a very good place to look at such a moment. A supply of either home-canned or commercially canned food will come to your rescue if you give it a chance.

No, I'm not in favor of living out of cans generally. I'm not an admirer of the girl who can't cook without a can opener. But for a rush meal or an emergency meal, there's nothing like a variety of foods in cans to help you out -- especially if you know about a few finishing touches to make those canned foods different.

For unexpected company with good hearty appetites such as your husband's two cronies, just mentioned -- yes, and for men guests generally, take down a can or two of baked beans. But don't just heat the beans and serve them as is. They are all right that way, to be sure. But they are twice as good if you add a little something new in seasoning and serve them attractively. For example, try a bit of mustard and molasses to season those beans. Old-fashioned New England cooks always baked their beans with a little dark molasses. And a pinch of mustard in the mixture adds a special tang. But not too much mustard, of course.

The quickest way to heat canned beans is in a saucepan on the top of the stove. And then, if you pour them hot into a baking dish and brown them in the oven with maybe a strip or two of bacon over the top, so much the better. They'll have that baked-bean look and also that baked taste, served this way.

And speaking of beans and bacon, have you ever tried canned string beans or canned lima beans heated with a piece of bacon and maybe also a little chopped onion? That's another good idea for a hurry-up meal. You can touch up canned lima beans with a little curry powder, too. Most men take to curry as a seasoning. Chopped canned pimento adds color to the mixture.

Another way to dress up canned foods in a hurry is with cheese. Turn a can of seasoned corn into a baking dish, put grated cheese and buttered crumbs over the top. After a short time in the oven, you'll have a hot, bubbling dish, golden brown on top, and good enough for the Queen of Sheba. White sauce with cheese in it makes a quick change for many canned foods -- asparagus, for example, and canned hominy, and canned peas or beans. Grated cheese sprinkled over the top of canned vegetables is another way to give variety.

Mentioning cheese-sauce, reminds me of sauce in general. A good sauce can transform many an everyday canned food into quite a dressy dish. Suppose now that unexpected company arrives tonight, Friday night, and you need a good main dish for your emergency meal. Well, just take down a can of salmon from the shelf and serve it with white sauce -- plain white sauce, or white sauce with chopped pickles and hard-cooked eggs in it. Or serve canned salmon or canned tuna fish with tomato sauce or hot Spanish sauce made with red and green pepper and onions and tomatoes. You can use these same sauces with canned beef. Another kind of sauce to dress up a good vegetable is sweet-sour sauce for canned beets. Make this sauce with the beet-juice plus vinegar, brown sugar, salt and pepper and a little cornstarch for thickening.

Still another quick way to give variety to canned foods is to combine them. For example, suppose you are planning to start the meal with soup. Try putting a can of vegetable soup and a can of beef soup together. Or try a can of chicken soup with a can of asparagus soup. You'll find innumerable good combinations just by experimenting. The last minute before serving, put a dash of red paprika or chopped parsley over the top of the hot soup or add a few little cubes of toasted bread to float on top.

Many canned vegetables make good matches, too, when you heat two kinds together. A familiar example: canned corn plus lima beans equals succotash. But corn and tomatoes get along well, too, especially if you top the combination with a little grated cheese. Corn and drained canned peas make a mixture as good as succotash. And canned mushrooms you can add profitably to your dish of creamed canned salmon. There's an appetizing Lenten dish.

As for the dessert in your emergency meal, here again original touches make a great difference. You can dress up canned pears or grapefruit or grated pineapple with some chopped mint leaves or dissolve mint candy in the juice. Crystallized ginger or ginger root is excellent with canned pears. And cinnamon and nutmeg make good flavoring for canned prunes or apple sauce. If you are serving canned fruit hot, a little butter adds flavor. Add butter if you are broiling canned peaches or apricots in the oven, or if you are frying pineapple slices. Finally, many canned foods combine well. Apricots and pineapple make good company. So do red and white cherries.